The Essential Guide to Children's Books and Their Creators
by Anita Silvey

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Introduction

"Because childhood is so brief, we need to expose our children to the best of our literary heritage in their childhood years. That remains the finest — and most poignant — gift we could ever give to the young." — Anita Silvey, from the introduction

With countless books being published every year, parents and educators need expert guidance in order to expose children to the best books available. The Essential Guide to Children's Books and Their Creators, edited by Anita Silvey, provides this guidance in one accessible, affordable reference. Assembling the best of Children's Books and Their Creators, the critically acclaimed survey of children's literature, this new volume offers a comprehensive and invaluable overview of the most important and innovative children's books written and illustrated in the last hundred years. In addition to focusing on authors whose works have stood the test of time, The Essential Guide to Children's Books and Their Creators profiles some of the most popular writers to arrive on the scene recently (like J. K. Rowling and Lemony Snicket) and looks at the latest trends in education and children's publishing. Other highlights of the more than 475 entries include
- reading lists, organized by category, that establish a canon of literature for children of the twenty-first century
- "Voices of the Creators" — essays offering personal glimpses into craft by well-known writers, illustrators, and critics
- essays on genres, including comic books and graphic novels, fantasy, folklore, information books, family stories, historical fiction, and Holocaust literature
- essays on multicultural themes and perspectives, including African American, Chinese American, Japanese American, and Latino.

In determining what to include in the book, Silvey carefully considered "historical importance, popularity, current interest in and availability of the books, and the overall contribution of the author or artist." Her thoughtful choices are books that, by their merit, "motivate children to read. They include captivating stories, compelling characters, and
imaginative use of language. They appeal to a wide and diverse audience."

Silvey is eminently qualified to make these selections. She has worked in the field of children's books for more than thirty years, including eleven years as editor in chief of the Horn Book Magazine, a publication many call "the bible of children's literature." During her stint at the Horn Book, she read several thousand books a year; she still reads more than two thousand children's books yearly as a professor, reviewer, writer, and well-known children's book advocate.

The Essential Guide to Children's Books and Their Creators is essential reading for anyone choosing a book for children today.

About the Author

Anita Silvey has worked in the field of children's books for more than thirty years, having divided her time equally among writing, publishing books, and evaluating children's literature. Her lifelong conviction that "only the very best of anything is good enough for the young" forms the cornerstone of all her work. For eleven years she served as editor in chief of the Horn Book Magazine; during that time she read several thousand books a year. A professor, reviewer, writer, and well-known children's book advocate, Silvey lectures throughout the United States and Canada and has appeared frequently on radio and television in her efforts to promote the best books available for our children.

A conversation with Anita Silvey about The Essential Guide to Children's Books and Their Creators

Q) How did you come to create this book?

A) The Essential Guide to Children's Books and Their Creators is a product of my reading and working in the field of children's books for more than thirty years. As editor of the Horn Book Magazine, I had a huge reference library at my command. But I was constantly searching in a dozen or more books to try to find the simple facts I wanted, or a simple overview of an author or illustrator. In the early 1990s, I edited Children's Books and Their Creators to address this need. But from the time the book was published in 1995 until now, many talented people began doing their best work. So I added 100 new essays and updated the information in the first volume.

Q) Who are your favorite authors and illustrators?

A) There are around 400 of them in The Essential Guide. So much talent exists in contemporary children's and young adult publishing. There may be a "100 best books" list for children, the ones you would take to a desert island. Fortunately, in The Essential Guide I could include several thousand of my favorite books.

Q) Who is the audience for this book?

A) First, parents can use The Essential Guide to see what their children are reading. If they
keep hearing their children talk about Captain Underpants or Lemony Snicket, they can find out what they need to know about both. Then it can help teachers locate books for the classroom. And, of course, children can read it to see what their favorite authors and illustrators have created. Several of the overview essays, such as those on picture books, historical fiction, and African American literature, are ideal for use in the college classroom. The copy editor for the volume actually found the book inspiring, because you can see how people came to their life's work, sometimes after trial and error. So The Essential Guide should please anyone with an interest in children's and young adult books — anyone seeking knowledge or inspiration.

Q) How many children's books do you read a year?
A) Around two thousand. Some people think this sounds like a terrible burden, but I love this literature and consider it a blessing to be able to read it. I only wish I had the time to read more.

Q) With all the demands on their time, what can parents do to encourage literate children?
A) At the beginning of The Essential Guide, I provide an extensive book list for parents; it includes the canon of children's books, all of our greatest books. Parents can literally change the lives of their children by simply reading something from this list for twenty minutes every day. They will be passing on to their children a great literary heritage — and they will be creating memories that will last all their children's lives. My mother used to read poetry to me every day while I did household chores. Even today, as I read certain poems, I hear her voice. Those few minutes spent reading have survived longer than any other memories of her. So if parents want to create lasting, positive memories, they can do nothing better than read the best of children's literature to their children.

Sample reading lists featured in The Essential Guide to Children's Books and Their Creators

PRESCHOOL BOOKS (ages 0-4)

Construction Zone (1999), Tama Hoban
Freight Train (1978), Donald Crews
Goodnight Moon (1947), Margaret Wise Brown, illustrated by Clement Hurd
Have You Seen My Duckling? (1984), Nancy Tafuri
Mr. Grumpy's Outing (1971), John Burningham
Rosie's Walk (1968), Pat Hutchins
The Snowman (1978), Raymond Briggs
Tuesday (1991), David Wiesner
The Very Hungry Caterpillar (1969), Eric Carle
Where's Spot? (1980), Eric Hill
EASY READERS (ages 7-8)

Amelia Bedelia series, Peggy Parish
The Cat in the Hat (1956), Dr. Seuss
Frog and Toad series, Arnold Lobel
Henry and Mudge series, Cynthia Rylant
Little Bear (1957), Else Holmelund Minarik
Nate the Great series, Marjorie Sharmat

CHAPTER BOOKS (ages 8-9)

And Then What Happened, Paul Revere? (1973), Jean Fritz, illustrated by Margot Tomes
The Courage of Sarah Noble (1954), Alice Dalgliesh
Encyclopedia Brown series, Donald Sobol
Little House in the Big Woods (1932), Laura Ingalls Wilder
My Father's Dragon (1948), Ruth Stiles Gannett
Ramona series, Beverly Cleary
Sarah, Plain and Tall (1985), Patricia MacLachlan
Stone Fox (1980), John Reynolds Gardiner

FANTASY

The Adventures of Pinocchio (1891), Carlo Collodi
Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865), Lewis Carroll
Animal Family (1965), Randall Jarrell
The Blue Sword (1982) and The Hero and the Crown (1985), Robin McKinley
Borrowers series, Mary Norton
Charlotte's Web (1952), E. B. White
Chronicles of Chrestomanci series, Diana Wynne Jones
Chronicles of Narnia series, C. S. Lewis
Chronicles of Prydain series, Lloyd Alexander
Dark Is Rising series, Susan Cooper,
Earthsea series, Ursula K. Le Guin
Five Children and It (1902), E. Nesbit
Greene Knowe series, Lucy M. Boston
Half-Magic (1954), Edward Eager
Harry Potter series, J. K. Rowling
The Hobbit (1938), J.R.R. Tolkien
Incredible Journey (1960), Sheila Burnford
The Mouse and His Child (2001), Russell Hoban, illustrated by David Small
Owl in Love (1993), Patrice Kindl
The Perilous Gard (1974), Elizabeth Marie Pope
Redwall series, Brian Jacques
The Secret Garden (1911), Frances Hodgson Burnett
The Story of Dr. Dolittle (1920), Hugh Lofting
The Sword in the Stone (1938), T. H. White
Tom's Midnight Garden (1958), Philippa Pearce
Tuck Everlasting (1975), Natalie Babbitt
The Wind in the Willows (1908), Kenneth Grahame  
Winnie-the-Pooh (1926), A. A. Milne  
The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (1900), L. Frank Baum  
A Wrinkle in Time (1962), Madeleine L'Engle

AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

The Dream Keeper (1932), Langston Hughes  
Every Man Heart Lay Down (1970), Lorenz Graham  
My Lives and How I Lost Them (1941) and The Lost Zoo (1940), Countee Cullen  
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry (1975), Let the Circle Be Unbroken (1981), and Road to Memphis (1990), Mildred Taylor  
Stevie (1964), John Steptoe  
Walk Together Children (1971), Ashley Bryan  
You Can't Pet a Possum (1934) and Sad-Faced Boy (1937), Arna Bontemps  
Zeely (1964) and M. C. Higgins the Great (1974), Virginia Hamilton

LATINO LITERATURE

Baseball in April and Other Stories (1990) and Local News (1993), Gary Soto  
El diablo inglés y otros cuentos (The English devil and other stories, 1969), Maria Elena Walsh  
Un diente se mueve (A loose tooth, 1990), Daniel Bardot  
Going Home (1986) and El Bronx Remembered: A Novella and Stories, Nicholasa Mohr  
Miguel y el pastel (Miguel and the cake, 1992), Maribel Suárez  
Teo en un día de fiesta (Teo during a holiday, 1987), Violeta Denou